



Claims Conference Holocaust Survivor Memoir Collection

Access to the print and/or digital copies of memoirs in this collection is made possible by USHMM on behalf of, and with the support of, the Conference on Jewish Material Claims Against Germany.

The United States Holocaust Memorial Museum Library respects the copyright and intellectual property rights associated with the materials in its collection. The Library holds the rights and permissions to put this material online. If you hold an active copyright to this work and would like to have your materials removed from the web please contact the USHMM Library by phone at 202-479-9717, or by email at digital_library@ushmm.org.

Transcribed by: Ilona Melyokhin
Sabina Veksler

Sitting across the table from a brave Partisan fighter, a heroic Holocaust survivor, we hear the words of Lubov Abramovich and know that we must never forget...

"The history of the Holocaust is the history in which society blamed Jews for all things that were bad in the world. This was an attempt to make everything vanish completely, from sight of the human race. During WWII the entire world knew what was going on in Europe, but the world remained mute. Nobody helped. In our days we can see the same trends returning and that is why I ask you not to forget about these horrific events. The shadows of the Holocaust are continuing to fall all over the world. I am happy that I can bring to you God's truth in the ocean of falsification and denial of the Holocaust"

The Germans entered the city of Slonim during the first few days of the war.

Mrs. Lubov Abramovich, then 21 years old, narrowly escaped a direct bomb hit, grabbing her 1-year old child on her way out. Neither Abramovich nor her husband could bring any belongings, not even a "drop of milk or a piece of bread." And because Slonim's homes were made of wood, the entire town went up in flames with great ease. The home "burned like a box of matches," Abramovich remembers.

Twenty-four days after the occupation, the Germans came for Abramovich's husband and 1,200 other young Jewish men. Entering the homes early in the morning they forced these young men into a former main market place. And after they confiscated all of their belongings and emptied their pockets, they beat them. On one occasion, Rabbi Fine, the local Rabbi, begged the Germans to let them go. The Rabbi was told to leave or go with them. He chose to go with them and was assassinated.

After the incident, the Germans spread rumors that the young men had left to work in another town, soon to return. But those who saw the direction in which they headed informed the town's people where they really went. Sometime later and it came to be known that the young men were killed in a nearby forest. "Later, the wives and mothers of those who were killed wanted to see gravesites and went in search of them, but were unable to find them. This was the first such experience for the people of our town," Abramovich says. "For a long time the people of Slonim did not know where their loved ones were buried."

In 1941, the Germans established a Slonim Ghetto surrounded by a wired fence. Because Slonim was the last city allowing refugees, its population grew rapidly from 20,000 to 25,000 to 40,000. The weary refugees arrived from Warsaw, Belostok, Lodi as well as small towns surrounding Slonim, settling into the ghetto consisting of three streets. The Ghetto's residents lived in close, cramped quarters, usually two or three families to a single room. "People were beginning to fall ill," Abramovich recalls. "And there was nobody to treat the sick ones. There was no food, and life was frightening."

But nothing could prepare Abramovich for what came one early November day. A friend had invited the young woman to gather some children's items for her son. Her friend was

late, and Abramovich waited. That time of year the days were short and dark. When her friend finally arrived, German police were patrolling the Ghetto, yelling "home, home, home." Abramovich tried to explain to the officers that she did not live there, but they refused to let her go. So Abramovich stayed the night, and early in the morning, she tried again to return home. But the Germans would still not let her go.

The dwelling's residents, including men who manned railroads and performed other physically demanding jobs from the wee hours of the morning, were told to stay home that day. That was when everyone began to hide. Some hid in the attic. Others hid in the storage room or under their beds. Abramovich was also forced into hiding with some of the residents who were afraid that she would give them away if the Germans were to catch her.

Sitting in an attic and looking out from a tiny window, the young woman was horrified by what she saw. Women, children, and old people were being forced out of their homes and shuffled into the center of the old market place. The ones who tried to get away were shot. "If a baby cried in its mother's arms they would shoot it to death or throw the child against the ground, the child would die, there wasn't even need to shoot it. My soul, my heart was breaking because I knew that the same fate awaited my child," Abramovich recalls.

With little else to do, she sat in the attic until 3 or 4 PM. When she finally came down, the streets were empty. People were leaving their hiding spaces, and she ran to her house. When she arrived there she found it empty. "My son was gone; my parents were gone, my brother...gone." Abramovich fainted, laying there for hours. When her brother-in-law, a Nutsleha Judah (useful Jew) unconfined to the Ghetto, finally came looking for her, he found her on the stairs.

"After my entire family had been killed, my brother-in-law found me lying on the stairs. He said that I would come live with him," Abramovich explains. She also recalls a distinct inability to connect with her new surroundings. After the pogrom, rumors began to spread that some of the dead were "stepping out of their graves." And it was true. The injured, thrown into dug outs alongside the dead bodies, were slowly rising from the dead. "I was hoping that one of my parents might be one of those who would step out of the graves," Abramovich said. But this did not happen.

One day, Abramovich ran into a childhood friend, Nynya Tzurinskij. "He asked me what I was doing, and when I said nothing and told him of my sorrow, he told me that everyone had the same sorrow and that now we only had vengeance." Tzurinskij told Abramovich that she should go to the Zhandermaria (a German police station) and that they were hiring women. Abramovich was hired to clean the bullets that would later be used to kill Jews. "Tzurinskij told me that each day that I was to go home I should take some bullets with me." She did as instructed.

At first, Abramovich brought home only a few bullets each day. But Tzurinskij insisted that this wasn't enough. And so, one day, the young woman packed her underwear, pockets, bra, and purse full of bullets. That was the day Abramovich ran into an SS

Transcribed by: Ilona Melyokhin
Sabina Veksler

officer. "When I saw him, my heart sank, I used to think I no longer wanted to live, I wanted to be taken to be with my family, there was no place for me here on this earth." But the deep-seated fear reminded her that she wanted to live.

The SS officer walked right by her. That night, Tzurinskij congratulated Abramovich on all she had brought. That's when she asked him for a job. There was already an underground organization in place and Tzurinskij was one of its organizers. The organization had been established on the basis of Slonim being near the border, and the Soviet Union wanted to fortify the town. A great deal of armor was delivered there and there was intent to bring in armed forces. Since the war began suddenly, the armed forces never arrived there.

When the Germans found out about the armor that was already in Slonim, they gathered it all into one house, creating a Boiten Lager (captured weapons camp.) Jews were forced to work there, cleaning and polishing, organizing and fixing the weapons. Jewish workers immediately recognized this opportunity to gather weapons.

And slowly they began stealing the gun parts, an act punishable by death. SS officers guarding the front door checked everybody's pockets. Among the workers was Deliatycky, a former communist who had spent time in prison. He organized those willing to work for the underground movement in groups of five, and they began to carry out the parts. When the men assembled the weapons, they deliberately left out tiny parts, rendering the weapons useless. When the Germans uncovered this, they became very frustrated, complaining to the owners of the Boiter Lager. The owners could not concede since it would undermine their authority. And so the Jews continued to sabotage the work of the Germans.

Once the weapons had been collected, the Jews looked for safe storage space. Unable to keep weapons in the Ghetto, they decided to store them in the home of one of the Nutsleha Juden. Everyone worked in two shifts. During the switching of the shifts, Jewish women came and smuggled weapons under their dresses. Walking in a line on the way back to the Ghetto they were accompanied by SS officers. As they neared the ghetto, they passed an obsolete outside bathroom next to the gate. Inside the bathroom, above the opening, lay a board into which Abramovich emptied the day's contents. An insider from the same cell would follow her to perform the pick-up.

The house where all the weapons were stored belonged to Nutsleha Juden brothers, Scheljubski. The brothers were furniture makers, kept as a resource by the Germans. They worked in the same 'cell' as Abramovich. In one of the house's rooms, there was a German trunk above a cellar with a removable bottom (Der Schrank.) There was a ladder leading to the cellar. From there, a tunnel had been dug leading to the Polish cemetery. And across the street from the Polish cemetery was the Jewish cemetery.

Once they collected as many weapons as they could store, the leaders of the underground group decided to contact the partisan troops. But since the partisans were in the forest, they had no way of establishing the contact. The group waited for the right opportunity, after a pogrom resulting in many Jewish deaths, after which the Germans were noticeably

“kinder,” permitting the Jews into the village. The underground’s authority took advantage of the situation, and Zorah Kremen headed to the village to make contact with the Partisans.

In the village, Zorah met Pavel Vasilyevich Pronyagin, the Commander of the partisan detachment named “Schores.” Zorah also met Commissar Dudko. Zorah reported that large quantities of weapons were being smuggled in the Slonim Ghetto on a daily basis, and Pronyagin said that what they were doing was truly amazing and that they should continue until they were close to being caught. The Commander directed Zorah’s team to escape into the woods in times of danger and reassured him that the partisans would be waiting for them.

Every two weeks, Pronyagin sent a horse and carriage and Abramovich’s group filled it with stolen weapons. The weapons were then carried into the forest and delivered to the partisan troops. Sometimes, they came close to being caught, running to the forest in fear of being killed. Many of Abramovich’s underground comrades escaped during this time. “The work of our group began at the end of December 1941 – beginning of January 1942 and we left the ghetto in August of 1942.”

In August of 1942, Abramovich’s group was forced to leave in a hurry after an incident in the ghetto. After an expected horse had arrived with its cart, the group loaded the weapons into the false bottom covered with bags of potatoes and prepared for departure into the forest. Suddenly, two policemen appeared out of nowhere and a fight broke out, resulting in deaths on both sides. Someone had tipped off the police. The provocateur escaped, never to be seen again.

At this point, Pronyagin commanded that everyone leave the ghetto and enter the woods. Abramovich left with the last group of underground fighters to join the partisan troops. Everyone arrived safely at the house of the brothers Scheljubski, the escape route into the forest.

There were twelve of them, Abramovich and eleven men. They waited for everyone to pass, their arms full of weapons, before crossing over to the Jewish cemetery, where the Partisans would be waiting for them. They were supposed to walk all night, but two kilometers from town, two horse carriages waited for them. The carriages helped them to transport guns, rifles and twelve machine guns.

As soon as Abramovich and the group left the ghetto, they faced bitter weather conditions. “We needed boots with special material protecting the footwear from the elements (portyanki: piece of material,) Abramovich remembers. Unable to properly cover her feet and forced to walk for two full days, Abramovich was covered in blisters. “I couldn’t even step on my feet” she recalls. When they arrived Abramovich was finally able to lie down in a make-shift tent made of tree branches. Her friends lit a fire and wanted her to sing. “I was a great singer, but I couldn’t even get up to make it to the fire, so they carried me in their arms and I sat there singing Jewish songs.”

Transcribed by: Ilona Melyokhin
Sabina Veksler

Once Abramovich safely arrived in the forest, she joined the Schores partisan troop, consisting of the Slonim underground and headed by Fedorovich. The woman stayed with the 51st group, a 150 person subdivision of the Schores detachment headed by Commander Pronyagin, for two weeks while everyone who came in from Slonim received military training. "The 51st group truly created miracles," Abramovich recalls. Pronyagin was always commander, but his Commissars were always changing.

As soon as the partisans learned of the Germans' plan to destroy the Kosovo ghetto, the Schores detachment broke through the German gornizon, ultimately freeing the entire ghetto. Five hundred people were released from the Kosovo ghetto; 300 of them joined the partisan movement and 200 organized a so-called family group comprised of old people (mostly tradesmen and craftsmen.)

Upon the death of Commissar Dudko, the newly appointed Commissar began to abuse the 51st group even though they had done more work than the rest of the detachment. The group put up with the abuse for some time but eventually went to the headquarters of the Commissar to inquire about the cause of the mistreatment. They waited all day, but nobody would speak with them. The following day, an order came in from the Commissar for the entire 51st group to report to headquarters.

When they arrived there, they saw that the Schores detachment was already holding weapons. The group was told to surrender their own weapons and the commander made a statement referring to the group members as "children of wealthy parents, who have white hands and can't go to battle." A house painter spoke up, asking the commander to "look at my hands, are these the hands of a wealthy person?" showing the entire group his hands. The commander said that he would either shoot everyone or force the group out of the forest. For some reason, he didn't go through with the plan.

At the time, a landing group, made up of people from Moscow who came to assist the Partisan movement, arrived in the forest. One such group was dropped off near the Schores detachment. On their way, they lost their radio messenger and Abramovich was selected to replace her. They also needed someone to cook for them and to care for their injured. While in the forest, she underwent special training to become a demolisher and learned how to blow up trains. She remained there until the end of the war. Abramovich actively participated in each battle but being a woman among all men was difficult, "when men see death in front of them each day, a woman is like a piece of candy". Women who did not know how to behave around men failed to command respect and empathy. She became a fighter alongside the men.

Abramovich took part in the destruction of three German garnizons (posts), Gesgilev, Rudayvorskaya and Boyarij. She blew up 12 trains (echelons). In her lectures, Abramovich often states that she destroyed 8 echelons, to stay more consistent with a book published by the Soviets in Belorussia in which the author misreported some information, stating that Abramovich took part in six echelons. The book discusses various roles played by women during the war, including baking, cooking and doing laundry. Very few women, including Abramovich, were recognized for playing a part in blowing up the trains. Lubov claims that she still finds it frustrating that the author and

Transcribed by: Ilona Melyokhin
Sabina Veksler

the Soviets in general, perpetually understated and undervalued the contribution of the Jewish partisans to the war efforts.

In the Spring of 1944, the Germans began to withdraw, and the partisans did all they could to hinder their withdrawal. They declared a war of the rails, derailing the German trains. Even if there were no trains that day the partisans would at least damage the rails. The Germans realized that the war was coming to an end. They were desperate and they were running. They decided to move some of their armed active troops into the forest to fight the partisans. Lubov's leadership commanded the group to retreat further into the forest. When they reached a swamp, they remained there for two to three full days without food. This was just weeks before war's end.

To get out of the swamp, the partisans had to break through the blockade. The question was where...the only place their leadership could think of was the Vilnus Track. That night all partisans in the surrounding forest gathered at Vilnus Track. Because of its proximity to the woods, Germans understood that the Vilnus Track would be the place where partisans would try to break the blockade. Along the track the Germans built bunkers with machine guns and other weapons. The partisans awaited command from leadership to move ahead. When the command came, Abramovich unexpectedly saw Lena, a peasant girl who came to the partisan movement with her father and brother.

Sometimes, when Abramovich and her comrades would return from their assignments, they would visit Lena's village and stop by her family's home. Lena fed them and prepared for them a wood-burning stove to keep warm. Abramovich was able to bathe herself near the stove. Sometimes, Lena even provided a small piece of soap or a clean shirt to change into.

There, at the Vilnus Track, Lena lay at Abramovich's feet, severely injured. She was a large girl while Abramovich was small and feeble, making it very difficult for her to drag Lena to safety. But Lubov could not walk away. "My conscience wouldn't allow me to leave her behind," Abramovich says. Abramovich soon realized that she had been left behind and that Germans were nearing quickly. She could hear them behind her. This was also when she realized that she could not help Lena and reluctantly ran, the gunshots ringing behind her. She made it.

"Many years later in my dreams I heard the sound of those gunshots behinds me. I was the last one to cross the Vilnus Track. I felt like I had been born again that night. That's when I thought that perhaps God does exist, because against all odds I survived".

During the last days of war, the partisans would wake up in the morning and put their heads to the ground to hear the Katyushas (the bombs). Around evening time they would stand and watch the different colored fireworks. Abramovich and her comrades returned to their base after they got through the Vilnus Track. Each day in the forest was possible death, but they knew that the war was nearing its end.

The Soviet army was approaching the forest with knowledge that the partisans were in the woods. A few of the soldiers ran into some of the partisans from the group. A soldier

from Slonim asked if there were any partisans from his town. When he learned about Abramovich, he claimed that they had been married. This was the only way he could express their friendship and get a message to her. When Abramovich's partisan comrades arrived in the forest, they told her that she ought to dance, since her "husband" had come looking for her. They also handed her a note from her friend. The happiness of hearing from her friend was bitter sweet. The war had ended and they all lost so much. In fact, she had nothing. Even if she were to remarry, Lubov would never be able to forget what had happened. "All things now feel temporary," she explains, adding that she will live with the grief until her last breath.

The war ended and the partisans received orders to move on to Shuchin. They did not find any Jews there even though the town had been predominantly Jewish. All of the Jewish homes had been destroyed, the windows broken, doors left open. It seemed as if the town had been robbed. "I saw that everything possible had been done to our people and that there were no more of our people, it was frightening".

Having no other places to live, the partisans moved into kazarmas (a place where soldiers live). Abramovich fell ill, lying on a bed of hay weeping and burning up from high fever. A doctor from Warsaw gave her medication and injections. Abramovich was young and survived, and after the war, she received medals of honor for her courage.

After the war, the young woman decided to move to Minsk to go back to school. While waiting for the train to Minsk, Abramovich accidentally fell asleep and her suitcase was stolen. When she finally arrived in Minsk, the city was destroyed. She roamed the streets, trying to find the sole person she knew there. By mere chance she ran into her almost immediately, the second miracle in Abramovich's short life. The woman invited Abramovich to live with her in her tiny home, with her husband and their baby. Abramovich was grateful but knew she had to find another way.

Abramovich remembered that her friend, Grisha Meltzer, lived in Minsk. If she could find Grisha, she thought, he might be able to help her. She went to a "reference center" in Minsk. Abramovich found Grisha's address according to his name and birth year and went to his home. Nobody was home so she left a note. That evening, Grisha came to find her. He was thrilled to see her and to share the news of his marriage. He insisted that she come to dinner and meet his wife. Later that evening, Grisha's brother arrived. "He was an elegant gentleman such as I hadn't seen before, wearing a hat. He later told me that it had been love at first sight." Lubov was 25 years old at the time and Benjamin, her future husband, was 30. Eventually, the couple married and Abramovich went on to study languages, earning a degree in Education. Abramovich worked for the Academy of Sciences.

In the early 1990s, Abramovich's brother and his family moved to the United States. Abramovich and her husband joined their only surviving family. The United States provided them with a comfortable life, for which they were always grateful. Abramovich's husband passed away in early 2012 after a brief illness, having lived a long and productive life.

Transcribed by: Ilona Melyokhin
Sabina Veksler

Abramovich is proud of the vital role that she played in the conviction of a known war criminal, General Erren, also known as “Bloody Erren”. In 1969, the KGB questioned her about her whereabouts at the time of the war. She confirmed that she knew General Erren of the SS. In 1941, Abramovich had been working in one of the cellars of the ghetto, cleaning bullets while the General hit and terrorized others. She had been looking out of her window.

At that time, 1969, Eli Wiesel was looking for survivors who could testify at the trials in Germany. Abramovich traveled to Hamburg several times during the trial, forming close bonds with a group of anti-Nazi German women. When she shared with them her experiences of the war they were disturbed and touched by her stories.

Despite Abramovich’s compelling testimony and ability to identify the General Erren on the photos presented, the court would render their decision only after an official visit to Slomin, where more evidence could be collected. The court wanted to verify the existence of the building as described by Abramovich, in particular a window from which she could have seen Erren. When the group arrived in Slomin with the court appointed officials, Abramovich was horrified to see that there were no windows where she vividly recalled. Afraid of being portrayed as a liar, Lubov proposed that they obtain the original blueprints of the building. The blueprints confirmed Lubov’s testimony and, upon closer inspection, one could see that bricks had been laid over what were once windows. Erren was convicted in 1973 and sentenced to life.

Transcribed by: Ilona Melyokhin
Sabina Veksler



Lubov and her mother



Lubov, her parents and her brother Yosef



Lubov



Lubov with her brother Yosef



Lubov with her late husband Benjamin



Lubov